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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAMAKO 000507

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SUBJECT: A FORMER MINISTER OF DEFENSE'S VIEW OF THE CRISIS  
IN NORTHERN MALI

REF: A. BAMAKO 00357  
[1](#)B. BAMAKO 00482  
[1](#)C. OUAGADOUGOU 00448  
[1](#)D. BAMAKO 00415

Classified By: Political Officer Aaron Sampson, Embassy Bamako, for  
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1.(C) Summary: On June 3, former Minister of Defense Soumeylou Boubeye Maiga met with the Ambassador to discuss Mali's response, or lack thereof, to deepening Tuareg unrest. Maiga described President Amadou Toumani Toure's plan for a regional Heads of State summit on Sahel-Saharan security as overly-optimistic and said Mali was not prepared to host such an event despite Foreign Minister Moctar Ouane's recent attempts to drum up support from neighboring capitals. The Heads of State summit is likely one of the agenda items for the UN's Special Representative for West Africa Said Djinnnet, who will be in Bamako to meet with President Toure and others from June 8-10. Maiga has urged President Toure to help the Tuareg rebel Alliance for Democracy and Change (ADC) re-assert its authority over dissident Tuareg rebel groups in order to serve as northern Mali's principal interlocutor. Maiga expressed concern that newly emergent rebel militias were not bound by the Algiers Accords which was signed by the ADC in July 2006 and said that Algeria could help unify disparate Tuareg movements under the ADC banner. He also stressed the need for Mali to set a public time-line for implementation of the Algiers Accords as a means of preventing Algeria from drawing out its mediation efforts. End Summary.

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The Ex-Minister  
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2.(C) On June 3, former Minister of Defense Soumeylou Boubeye Maiga met with the Ambassador to share his views on the situation in northern Mali and President Toure's proposed regional summit on security issues. Maiga is from the northern city of Gao and served as Defense Minister and Director of State Security under former President Alpha Oumar Konare. He was among seven candidates who challenged President Toure for the presidency in 2007 but finished far back in the pack with less than 2 percent of the vote. Although his political support base is slim, President Toure and others respect Maiga's continued ties to the Malian security services and his influence within the Songhai community of Gao and northern Mali. Maiga now serves as an informal advisor to President Toure and others in Bamako on Sahel-Saharan security.

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Views on the Regional Summit  
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3.(C) Over the past few months President Toure has repeatedly raised the idea of a regional Heads of State summit on regional security as a response to multiple and growing threats in northern Mali and across the Sahel-Saharan zone (Ref. A). Although Foreign Minister Moutar Ouane has traveled to several neighboring capitals to drum up summit support, there is no indication that a regional Heads of State meeting in Bamako is any closer to fruition. The local UN representative in Bamako told the Embassy on June 2 that the UN's Special Representative for West Africa, Said Djinnat, would likely discuss the proposed summit with President Toure during Djinnat's June 8-10 visit to Bamako.

4.(C) Maiga posited that the planning for a summit has faltered due to a failure on the part of President Toure to narrow down Mali's objectives for the summit. "If we invite people without formulating any clear ideas ahead of time," said Maiga, "we risk an impasse." Maiga said Niger indicated interest in a summit despite Presidents Toure and Tandja's differing approaches to Tuareg unrest, but Algeria was pressing for a Ministerial level meeting rather than a Presidential conference. Libya has also apparently balked at the idea of a regional Heads of State meeting. "If the summit doesn't happen in June," said Maiga, "it is unlikely to happen at all."

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Helping Tuareg Rebels Help Themselves  
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5.(C) Since the ADC signed the Algiers Accords on behalf of dissident Kidal Tuaregs in July 2006, it is not clear whether newly emergent groups, each with their own agendas, are bound by the Algiers framework. Maiga questioned whether Mali could negotiate Accords implementation with Ibrahim Bahanga or representatives of other groups not affiliated with the ADC. He said the cease-fire agreement reached in Tripoli in March 2008 was problematic because it was negotiated with members of Bahanga's group who were not part of the Algiers process. Maiga advocated resolving this anomaly by bringing everyone back under the umbrella of the ADC since this is the only Tuareg movement officially recognized by the Malian government. Otherwise, said Maiga, Mali is headed toward an intra-Tuareg confrontation that will leave the Malian government at the mercy of random groups of rebels and bandits.

6.(C) Maiga said he has advised President Toure to help the ADC reconstitute itself in order to re-exert its authority over Bahanga and others. This apparently includes allowing time for the ADC and Tuaregs to regroup in order to select a new point person for negotiations with the government. (Note: ADC spokesman Ahmada ag Bibi and National Assembly Deputy Alghabass Intallah pitched the same or a similar notion to President Toure last week, although their demand was predicated on a cease-fire declaration by President Toure (Ref. B). End Note.) Maiga said Mali should demand the unconditional release of the approximately 50 Malian soldiers captured by the ADC during the May 21 attack in Abeibara and 33 hostages still held by Bahanga as a prerequisite to negotiation.

7.(C) When asked who could spearhead the ADC in place of the absent ADC president Iyad ag Ghali, Maiga cited either ag Bibi or Lt. Col. Bah Moussa. Maiga speculated that money could resolve most of the differences between these groups. He indicated that Algeria was also working to unify Tuareg groups but warned that Mali needed to publicly articulate a time-line in order to prevent Algeria from dragging out its mediation ad infinitum.

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Refugees, Mixed Units and a Murder Inquiry

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8.(C) On June 2 international and local media carried reports of several hundred refugees crossing the border into Burkina Faso to flee fighting in northern Mali (Ref. C). These refugees are likely not from the northern region of Kidal, as indicated by international press reports, given the distance between Kidal and the Burkina frontier. Embassy staff who have heard radio interviews with the refugees report that their accents are consistent with individuals from the Gao region near the frontier with Burkina. Nevertheless, refugees and internally displaced persons have been a problem in northern Mali since Ibrahim Bahanga began systematic attacks against the Malian military around Tinzawaten in August 2007 (Ref. D). Until now, these displaced populations have taken refuge in extremely remote areas of northern Mali or been absorbed into the Tuareg zones of southern Algeria. Maiga said news of Malian refugees in camps in neighboring Burkina increased pressure on the Malian government by placing a human face on a small-scale humanitarian crisis that has been brewing since late 2007.

9.(C) Maiga identified the creation of mixed military units as one of the central components of the Algiers Accords and proposed a vast overhaul of the Malian military - complete with regional and international peace keepers based in northern Mali - in order to fulfill requirements for both the mixed units and the repositioning of the Malian military to pre-2006 levels. Maiga faulted President Toure for failing to articulate a clear road map for the creation and integration of mixed military units. He attributed this in large part to internal bureaucratic divisions within the Malian government. He also noted that, in addition to there being no point person for the Tuareg side, the Malians appear to be muddled in a tug-of-war between the Ministries of Defense, Internal Security and Territorial Administration over who controls northern policy. This confusion, or lack of authority, contributed in Maiga's view to Mali's failure to send any senior civilian or military leaders to visit Malian troops in the north following the May 21 battle in Abeibara. Maiga said Mali's losses on May 21 were larger than anything experienced during the rebellion of the 1990s.

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10.(C) Maiga has also urged the Malian government to publicly announce an official inquiry into the April 10 executions of two Tuareg ADC members in Kidal. One of the two victims, Barka ag Cheikh, had been integrated into the Malian army yet was buried hastily without the military honors normally accorded to a fallen member of the Malian armed forces. Maiga said this decision fueled suspicion on the Tuareg side of a governmental cover-up.

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Comment: Theory Meets Reality in Northern Mali  
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11.(C) Maiga operates at a theoretical level that is often several steps removed from practical reality. Some of his notions, such as a vast military reorganization involving regional and international peace-keepers based in the northern hamlet of Tessalit, are not practical in view of the Malian government's limited resources and the remoteness of northern Mali. His assessment of progress toward a regional Head of State summit on security and the need to unify Tuareg rebel groups is, however, note worthy. We share Maiga's pessimism about Mali's ability to cobble together a summit agenda and secure the attendance of key regional leaders in the near future. While the Malians are masters of last-minute logistics, differences between Mali, Algeria and Libya over the proposed summit's format may be insurmountable.

12.(C) Realigning Tuareg rebel groups behind the ADC may also be a good idea in theory and clearly corresponds with

ADC spokesman ag Bibi's point of view. In practice, however, unifying Tuareg rebel groups will prove difficult given the divergent interest of Tuareg militias and the ADC's evident leadership void. Neither ag Bibi nor Bah Moussa appear well placed to influence Ibrahim Bahanga or even smaller groups of bandits now operating independent of the ADC. Ag Bibi lacks the rebel credentials of the absent ADC leader Iyad ag Ghali.

While Bah Moussa's clearly possesses the requisite military experience, his diplomatic abilities remain unknown. There is also no indication of any willingness on the part of either the ADC or Bahanga to release the estimated 80 Malian soldiers they are currently holding as "prisoners of war."

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